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ABSTRACT

The Open College Federation of the North West was initiated in 1975 as a result of an agreement between the University of Lancaster, Nelson and Colne Tertiary College, and the Lancashire Polytechnic. Its aims were to prepare adults for entry into higher education, create a range of intermediate-level courses for adults that were academic but that could be taken for interest alone, and develop courses that could improve adults' job prospects. In 1982 the institutions belonging to the federation received a grant to develop an open college unit in distance learning form. A course team approach was adopted to developing learning materials for a course in criminology. Two sets of instructional units, one with integrated study guides and the other with separate guides, were developed and field-tested with 60 individuals (current students in criminology, social sciences, and sociology and inspector trainees from the Lancashire constabulary). The integrated study guides proved to be better and were thus selected for use with 18 students enrolled in a pilot course. The tutors and coordinators who used the materials found them to be excellent and to increase the accessibility and flexibility of the federation's stage B criminology course. (MN)

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Development of Learning Materials in the Open College Federation of the North West

A Summary Document

CE 051 479

Development of Learning Materials in the Open College Federation of the North West: A Summary

Keith Percy

University of Lancaster

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FOREWORD

This summary report written by Keith Percy is an account and analysis of the processes involved in the production of open learning materials by the Open College Federation of the North West (OCFNW).

Particular to the project are the OCFNW setting and the selected subject for materials development, namely criminology. Common to the development of open learning materials are many of the processes of preparation and the problems encountered.

The report identifies some problems concerning the preparation of open learning materials: staff inexperience, lack of proper resourcing, lack of agreement over the nature of good open learning materials, the use of open learning consultants and copyright issues, but nevertheless remains committed to the benefits of the exercise.

For those involved in LEAs and institutions developing open learning this project report comes as a timely reminder that materials development is a complex and relatively expensive task.

For authorities and institutions prepared to accept the challenge and who wish to undertake open learning materials development, the final section of the report contains a check-list of factors which should be agreed before a project commences. These factors include adequate finance and time, clear objectives, staff training and an allowance for a developmental testing phase.

FEU has published other materials relevant to the development of open learning systems: *Implementing Open Learning in Local Authority Institutions* (FEU/Open Learning Branch, MSC, 2nd ed 1987); *Staff Development for Open Learning Tutors* (1986) and *Learning Workshops* (Longman for FEU, 1987).

Geoff Stanton
Chief Officer
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1. THE OPEN COLLEGE FEDERATION OF THE NORTH WEST

The Open College Federation of the North West (OCFNW) was initiated in 1975 as a result of an agreement between the University of Lancaster, Nelson and Colne Tertiary College and the Lancashire (then Preston) Polytechnic. The agreement was originally called the 'Alternatives to "A" level' scheme for mature students and its aims were two-fold:

- to prepare adults for entry to higher education; indeed to enable them to attend part-time courses specially prepared for them which would lead, if successful, to matriculation qualifications;

- to create a range of intermediate level courses for adults, which were academic in nature and could be taken for interest alone.

A third aim was agreed for the scheme in the late 1980s:

- to develop courses which, if taken successfully, would improve the job prospects of adults.

In 1976, a few dozen adults enrolled on the first part-time courses at Nelson and Colne College, created as a result of the agreement. The scheme immediately attracted the attention of the educational media; it was seen then as being pioneering in at least two aspects:

- in opening learning for adults by designing courses which were, it was claimed, particularly appropriate to them in context, teaching methods and learning environment;

- by being a cross-binary and cross-sector collaboration between a university, a polytechnic and a further education college.

From the start, enquirers and interested parties began beating a path to the doors of the institutional partners of the OCFNW to find out how the scheme was functioning and if it should be replicated elsewhere, and they have continued to do so. Throughout the decade 1976-1986, the OCFNW has clearly provided a model for imitation, modification or rejection by successive waves of open colleges, second chance and access educational schemes for adults which have been created throughout the country.

The OCFNW has experienced remarkable growth since 1976. Thirteen institutions of further education in five local authorities in the North West are currently, with the university and the polytechnic, members of the federation. Part-time courses (called units) of the OCFNW are available at two levels – Stage A (introductory units which 'provide a useful foundation for further study' and which are not formally assessed) and Stage B (units in which adults 'can develop their interests further by studying subjects in more detail' and which, if students opt to take formal assessment and are successful, will count towards higher education matriculation). Thus, in 1985/6, the OCFNW achieved 4,430 enrolments - 3,230 at Stage A and 1,200 at Stage B. By summer 1986, over 6,000 adults had taken OCFNW courses since the agreement began. By that date, 1,200 adults had taken Stage B examinations (formal assessment at Stage B is a combination of course work and examination assessment), over 300 former OCFNW students had been admitted to degree courses in institutions of higher education, and over 100 had already graduated.

OCFNW units are taught (mostly in the evenings) within the constituent further education institutions as part of the normal 'vocational' part-time course programme; students pay fees at the appropriate local authority level. There is a rigorous course approval structure: a college tutor will put forward a proposal for a new unit in a standardised form with detailed syllabus and book list. It is then scrutinised by a sub-committee of the federation and often referred back for clarification. If it is finally accepted, an 'adviser(s)' will be appointed from the university and/or polytechnic to remain in touch with the course and, if it is at Stage B level, to share in the formal assessment. The unit then joins the long list of approved units from which, each year (in the case of Stage A, twice yearly – September and January), a college determines the units it will make available locally.

In 1986/7, the list of approved OCFNW units contained 72 titles – 2 Stage A introductory units ('Study Techniques' and 'Methods of Enquiry'), 32 other Stage A units, and 38 Stage B units. Both Stage A and Stage B units can be grouped into the following areas:

— Arts and Humanities;
— Mathematics;
— Science and Engineering;
— Social Sciences;
— Business Studies;
— Languages.

A particular drive in the 1980s has been to develop vocationally connected units in, for example, electronics, microprocessor systems, industrial relations, bookkeeping and marketing. However, enrolment in such units is confined to the minority. The three subjects English, Psychology and Sociology (at both Stage A and B) continue to attract over two-thirds of the enrolments.

The OCFNW has no central directorate. In each constituent college there is an OCFNW co-ordinator who is responsible for tutor liaison, student counselling, publicity and other organisational matters within the college relating to OCFNW provision. Co-ordinators are members of the college's lecturing staff; some are given a few hours' remission from teaching duties in lieu of OCFNW duties - some are not. Central administrative duties (servicing committees, co-ordinating Stage B assessment across the colleges, initiating OCFNW publications and other matters) are carried out by an assistant registrar in the university (OCFNW duties are calculated as approximately 40% of the work-load). There is an inter-college OCFNW co-ordinator who is a salaried lecturer of the Lancashire local authority; his (almost full-time) responsibilities include liaison, advocacy and academic development within the OCFNW. These administrative inputs into the OCFNW can be costed loosely at between £20,000 and £30,000. There is a marked contrast with the grants of £100,000 which are currently received from various sources by the Open College of South London and the Manchester Open College Federation.*

*By Easter 1988 this situation had changed significantly. OCFNW had over 7,000 student enrolments in 1987/88; Lancashire County Council recognised the increased administrative load by making available monies to finance a senior clerical post to assist the assistant registrar at the university.

2. DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE OPEN COLLEGE FEDERATION OF THE NORTH WEST

The FEU distance learning project (within the OCFNW) to develop the Stage B Criminology unit in distance learning form was developed in response to a perceived need.

A considerable amount of data on the characteristics and peformance of students had been accumulated. Some of the data was gathered through a series of small, externally funded research projects (notably those in 1979-1981 funded by the Council for Educational Technology); the remainder had been gathered through systematic annual administrative monitoring.

In a publication of 1980[1] reporting on a substantial postal survey and interview study of two-thirds of OCFNW students then enrolled, it was shown that almost 60% of the students were female, two-thirds were married and almost 60% were in the age group 26-45 years (but only 5% over 60 years). 79.5% of the male students and 37.4% of the female students were in full-time employment. Importantly, for the distance learning project, OCFNW students were shown to be local to the colleges and largely not working class. Only a small percentage (13.7%) had not undertaken any form of study between leaving school and entering the OCFNW.

A follow-up study of the same student sample (undertaken in 1981 but published in 1983)[2] added some important qualitative dimensions to understanding the study performance of OCFNW students, including an investigation of adults who enrolled in the OCFNW, completed only a few (or no) units, and were not currently enrolled in any other 'academic' courses. Interestingly, it was found necessary to make a distinction between 'drop-outs' and 'leavers' - the former being adults who had not completed the last unit on which they were enrolled, the latter being the remainder who no longer attended. Broadly speaking, reasons or circumstances extrinsic to the unit(s) of study (e.g. difficulty in attending classes regularly, personal/domestic circumstances, family commitments, job commitments) weighed more heavily with 'drop-outs' than with 'leavers', by whom intrinsic reasons or circumstances ('had completed all units that were of interest', 'did not like way unit was taught') were more often mentioned. A factor which both groups recognised was the possible future non-availability of particular OCFNW units at the local college (because of the local authority requirement for classes to achieve a minimum viable size.)

A survey undertaken in Autumn 1984[3] largely confirmed the findings of the 1979 research on the characteristics of OCFNW students (on sex, age, marital status, age of leaving school, distance between home and college). This is important because OCFNW enrolments more than doubled, from 911 in September 1979 to 2030 in September 1984. Manifestly, growth in numbers did not necessarily bring with it a broadening in recruitment. The 1984 research data was derived from questionnaires completed by 738 students enrolled in 8 out of 12 colleges, and did reveal one important change in student characteristics since 1979. In 1984, 26.6% of OCFNW students identified themselves as 'registered unemployed and seeking work'; the comparable figure in 1979 was 4%.

This sort of information was regularly fed back to the committee and the various constituent partners of the OCFNW. There were regular expressions of concern from all quarters, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, about the problems faced by shift workers, home-bound persons and those living rurally or at a distance of more than a few miles from a college in having access to OCFNW courses. There were emphatic worries about the failure of the OCFNW in reaching the families of unskilled and partially skilled workers; about the difficulties for students if a Stage B unit on which they wished to enrol did not recruit a viable number of persons; and about the need for flexible arrangements for unemployed students re-entering employment but finding it difficult to continue studies in the same mode. All those factors and issues put questions of 'open' and 'distance' learning onto the agenda of the OCFNW at that time.

As early as 1977, with the help of the National Extension College, Nelson and Colne College had developed home-study versions of the two OCFNW introductory Stage A units in 'Study Techniques' and 'Scientific Method'. In subsequent years these materials were used on a limited basis within the OCFNW, often to support class-based teaching. In May 1981, an internally commissioned feasibility study recommended that the OCFNW could not afford to develop its Stage B units in 'anything approaching a "pure" distance form', i.e. as specially written, free-standing, independent study materials. However, it did seem feasible to undertake a limited development of specially written study guides and commentaries on existing texts and resources available within a particular field - 'as a pilot development, one or preferably two Stage B units (should) be selected and ... groups of tutors employed to produce a home-study course to cover each syllabus using, as far as possible, existing texts and materials.'[4] In this way, the feasibility study urged, shift workers and others not able or not wishing to attend a classroom-based course in a college would have access to the OCFNW, and tutors in classroom-based courses would have a materials resource available to increase the flexibility of their use of contact time and as a revision aid. The study reviewed the Stage B courses on offer and recommended that criminology be the first to be developed, on the grounds that

student demand for it was very buoyant and there was some interest in it from professionals working unsocial hours (e.g. police and probation officers).

One essential of the recommendations was that the work on the materials be undertaken 'in-house' by OCFNW tutors (i.e. lecturers in further education) who had experience of teaching the courses face-to-face. The reaction of the OCFNW criminology tutors to the prospect of involvement in the procedures recommended by the feasibility study was mixed.

The OCFNW, however, is a many-layered body with initiative-taking and decision-making processes dispersed throughout its structures. While the criminology tutors were deliberating, negotiations were also taking place at a different level between the OCFNW and the Further Education Unit. It was made known that a grant of £1,000 (soon to be realised as £2,000) could be forthcoming from the Further Education Unit to support an OCFNW distance learning initiative. A proposal was made on behalf of the OCFNW and accepted in January 1982.

3. THE PROJECT

The £2,000 grant from the Further Education Unit was for the 'development of an open college unit into distance learning form.' Two-thirds of the amount was to be for various staff costs and £300 was the amount written in for 'copyright permission, graphics and printing.' Basically, the proposal to the FEU had reiterated the recommendations of the feasibility study as the objectives of the work for which financial support was sought. However, the proposal emphasised that the value to the FEU of the project would not lie in the distance learning materials themselves but in an analysis of the processes involved in producing them:

> *An outcome of the project which will be of general value to the further and higher education sectors will be a report on the procedures and processes involved in an inter-institutional (cross-binary) collaboration to produce distance learning materials, on the successes and problems experienced in developing relevant skills in further education lecturers, and on the experience of adult students in using these materials.*

The organising tutor for extra-mural studies at the University of Lancaster and the co-ordinator for continuing education at the Lancashire Polytechnic were named in the proposal as joint directors. To all intents and purposes, the OCFNW's inter-college co-ordinator was to function as a third joint director. Project funds were held at the university. To the extent that subsequently the co-directors made decisions, they made them jointly, and they met and communicated frequently.

In their initial review the co-directors immediately concluded that the FEU grant would not be sufficient to remunerate writers for production of distance learning materials for a whole Stage B unit, even in the limited format proposed by the feasibility study. Further funds would have to be sought.

The co-directors agreed quickly on the need for a course team approach, with a convenor/editor leading a group of writers who, preferably, would already have had experience of teaching criminology to OCFNW students. Fortunately, one of the OCFNW advisers for criminology (a polytechnic lecturer) quickly agreed to be editor, but not without misgivings. He suggested that the FEU grant be used to fund a half-time research assistant, based in one of the colleges or the polytechnic, to do all the 'leg work' for the writers and help co-ordinate their efforts. A (very) part-time research assistant was appointed to monitor the activities of the course team and the co-directors and to produce interim reports. Much of this report is based on those interim reports.

The reluctance of OCFNW criminology tutors to participate in the project remained; however, two were recruited. At least one was emphatic that writers must be understood to retain copyright of what they wrote, particularly if used outside the context of the OCFNW. One of these tutors/writers was a full-time lecturer at Nelson and Colne College; the other was a part-time tutor (but later, in 1982, full-time) at W R Tuson College in Preston. One of the writers and the editor had no experience of writing distance learning materials; one writer had been involved in the preparation of home-study materials while a teacher in a comprehensive school.

The co-directors arranged a one-day workshop on writing distance learning materials in March 1982, led by a facilitator from the Council for Educational Technology. Of the project team, only one of the co-directors and one of the writers attended. This underlined what was already emerging as a significant factor in the project – for all participants it was essentially a spare-time occupation. Remission of teaching hours was asked for but proved not to be possible for the writer who was a full-time lecturer. All his courses at college recruited heavily that year and there were no colleagues to take his place. When the other writer became full-time, it was not opportune for him to obtain remission.

Nevertheless, the project soon began to take shape. The course team (the editor and the writers) reviewed the current syllabus of the Stage B Criminology unit and decided to produce material in ten sections. Each writer would produce four sections and work in areas in line with his or her particular academic interests. The two writers would share the responsibility of producing the introductory section, which would be the most substantial. The tenth section would be written by the editor or by a writer nominated by him.

In an early meeting between the course team and the co-directors, some crucial decisions were made and some important distinctions emerged. There would be a draft outline, two drafts and a final version of each section. Writers would receive £100 for each section, paid in instalments at each stage of the process of production. The editor would receive a one-off payment.

The editor and writers told the co-directors that, in their professional view, the distance learning materials could not be produced in the form recommended by the feasibility study, i.e. by writing brief linking commentaries to pre-existing published works and fitting all into a guided reading plan. Their view was that, in the field of criminology, the published works were not suitable for this purpose – they were usually too advanced and/or too expensive and/or in a style inappropriate for OCFNW students. They, therefore, envisaged that the materials they would produce would be short extracts connected by specially

written commentaries, all produced together in a free-standing self-contained package. The co-directors, although not necessarily agreeing with this view, were in no position (none being criminologists) to dispute it. It certainly increased the scale of the task for the writers and, although not fully realised at the time, was a significant re-orientation of the project. The procedure recommended by the editor and writers was adopted. The writers were committed to substantial new writing in each unit, and submitted themselves to a tight schedule for delivery of the first drafts.

Additional financial support for the project was secured from Lancashire County Council, amounting to £695. In Autumn 1982 the co-directors suggested to the course team that some of this additional amount should be used to appoint 'open learning consultants' who would assist the writers in re-casting first draft materials into 'distance' or 'open' learning form (quite significantly, notes of meetings show that, at the time, the two adjectives were being used almost interchangeably). This suggestion was made in the knowledge that two persons were available with relevant knowledge and experience. The idea was that writer and consultant in each college should work as a team. In fact, one of the consultants left the area soon afterwards, but the other gave considerable support throughout the second draft stage.

Now that it was clear that substantial published extracts were being included in the units, the issue of copyright became prominent. Copyright permissions were sought for a selection of extracts in Unit 1 and other advice taken. The responses received and the advice given suggested that as long as copyright was requested for a 'restricted group of students in a limited geographical area', much copyright permission would be given free of charge or for nominal payments.

The record of a meeting of all participants in the project, in March 1983, has an air of crisis about it. It shows that the writers and editor were concerned that exclusive use of 'independent learning format' might 'spoonfeed' students and 'might direct attention to sentence detail rather than to the overall thrust of an argument developed over a paragraph or paragraphs'. The consultants, on the other hand, 'urged the need to encourage students to be active rather than passive through the structuring of materials' and proposed that the main text of the units should be left largely as they were 'but to add to them study guides based on the Keller plan model'. Inherent in this approach would be a clear statement of the objectives to be achieved by the student for each unit and means for the student to assess whether he or she had achieved these objectives before passing on to the next unit. The tutor, if there was a tutor, would interact with each individual student's progress through the learning package.

After lengthy discussion, it was agreed that study guides for the units would be produced, but it could not be agreed whether they should be produced as

separate booklets or 'dispersed throughout the units and integrated with them.' However, materials were now at a stage at which they could be developmentally tested, and the issue of study guides was left for resolution by the developmental testing. The procedures for developmental testing were relatively elaborate. The plan was that Units 2 and 3 would be produced in two formats: one with an integrated study guide and one with a separate study guide. Sixty individuals were to be recruited as 'guinea-pigs' to work through different combinations of materials and complete unit report forms. They would be recruited from four populations:

- current OCFNW students on the Stage B Criminology unit in colleges;
- current OCFNW students on Stage A Introduction to Social Sciences;
- current first year Lancashire Polytechnic sociology degree students;
- inspector trainees from the Lancashire constabulary.

The developmental testing took place in late May and early June 1983 and, considering its complexities, was conducted efficiently. The results were largely encouraging. The linked commentaries (written by the course team) were regarded positively by most respondents; the reaction to the extracts from published materials was more muted but, nevertheless, satisfactory. The police trainees tended to find the materials more obscure and long-winded than the other groups of respondents did. On the question of the study guides and whether they should be integrated or separate, the results of the developmental testing were ambivalent.

Decisions were taken to integrate study guides within the units and to produce the units through a word processor and the polytechnic print unit. The goal that was now agreed on was to enrol 'real' students on the unit, using the distance learning materials, in September 1983. The educational year 1983-4 would be used as a 'pilot' for the materials and would be monitored as closely as possible. During the year, copyright permissions would be sought for all extracts, no matter how short. For the 'pilot' year, it was agreed that students should be recruited in Nelson and Colne and W R Tuson Colleges, with the two writers designated as tutors. The pilot course, it was emphasised, would have to be regarded by the colleges as being formally like any other college course, i.e. requiring the same designation of tutor time (3 hours per week, 32 weeks per year). Tutors should have flexibility in using this time, and would be monitored. It was believed that telephone contact would be a major feature of tutor/student linkage. There should be flexibility to enrol students until January 1984 (this allowing for a partial 'roll-on, roll-off' arrangement), but examinations for all students would be in June 1984.

In fact, 18 students were enrolled on the pilot unit in September/October 1983 - ten at Tuson and eight at Nelson and Colne. By May 1984 all units had passed through the third draft stage and had been produced and distributed to students. Six of the 18 students completed the unit and the assessment (including the June examination) and achieved pass marks.

The monitoring reports show that the tutors made themselves as accessible as possible during this 'pilot' year. Fewer specially organised face-to-face group tutorials were arranged than had been anticipated by tutors; there appeared not to be a strong student demand for them. One or two students attended ordinary OCFNW classes at college when they could (i.e. according to shift times); there was significant correspondence and telephone conversations between tutors and students. Tutors often initiated contacts with students who remained out of contact for a period of time. It was very clear that use was made of the materials by students in the ordinary face-to-face OCFNW criminology classes and that tutors and students found them very useful – giving flexibility, support and help with revision.

Very little rewriting of the material in Units 1, 2 and 3 took place after the developmental testing of early summer 1983 had shown that some students (and some particular kinds of students) had found certain parts difficult and/or long-winded. There had not been time; the production schedule for an Autumn 1983 start was very tight. The unit report forms returned during 1983-4 also showed that a small minority of students had difficulty with vocabulary, content, approach, etc. Moreover, the process of seeking copyright permissions during 1983-4 revealed other problems and issues. The absence of a technical editor had resulted in the material going through several drafts (and several hands – writer, editor, open learning consultant, writer again and sometimes second writer) and extracts from published works being changed, re-ordered, and then printed without (sometimes) proper referencing. Thus, the requests for copyright could not be sent out without going back to the beginning of the process and – with the help of the writers – tracing the original source (in the correct edition!) of the extracts and checking it word-for-word against the version in the unit.

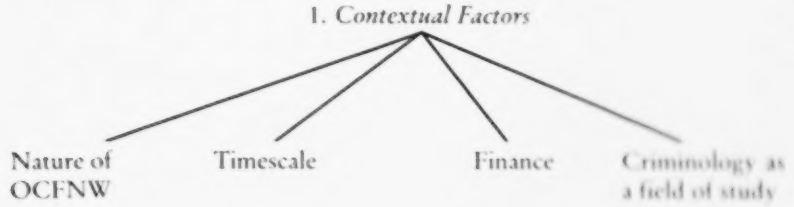
Therefore, despite the interesting and successful experience of the 1983-4 pilot year, an OCFNW sub-committee, with the full agreement of the co-directors, proposed that the materials should not be made available until all the editing, reprographic and copyright problems were sorted out. The processes involved proved long-winded and frustrating and were carried out on virtually a nil budget. During the winter of 1985-6 the FEU offered an additional grant of £1,000 for a suitable supplementary proposal, if the grant would be sufficient to bring the project to a satisfactory close. Ultimately, the target for the OCFNW Stage B: Criminology unit, to be available for use in final form by the constituent colleges in September 1986, was achieved.

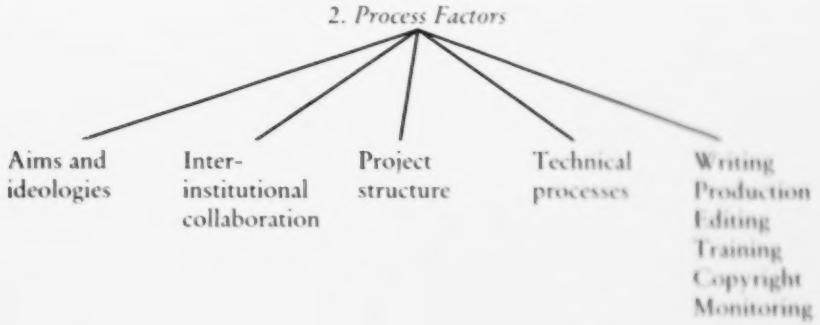
In September 1986, the immediate response of the constituent colleges of the OCFNW to the final availability of the criminology materials was cautious. Nevertheless, one college organised a preliminary meeting and immediately recruited a group of about a dozen students, while another proposed, taking advantage of an OCFNW decision to run Stage B: Criminology examinations in both June and February, to enrol students on the course from February 1987. Other colleges proposed to acquire units to help individual students and for further use in the future. A considerable quantity of units were printed and stockpiled at the polytechnic for future years. They were made available to colleges at £2 per unit for use as they saw fit. Colleges could sell them to bona fide OCFNW students, put them in the college library for use by OCFNW students, hire them to students, or make them available to tutors or students in association with classroom-based tuition.

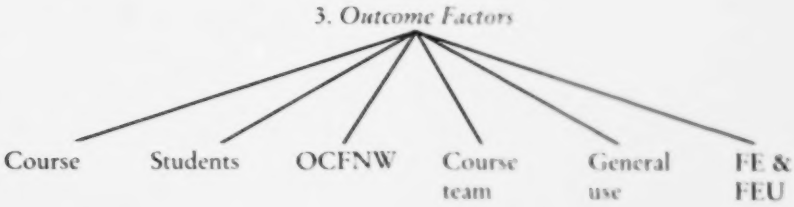
The general reaction of OCFNW co-ordinators and tutors who inspected the material in September/October 1986 was that the materials were excellent and greatly increased the accessibility and flexibility of the Stage B Criminology course.

4. ISSUES

This section attempts to draw together and discuss issues and outcomes which arise from the systematic monitoring to which the project was subjected. The discussion examines the following factors which appear, from the monitoring reports, to be central in an evaluation of the criminology project.







Contextual factors

It is apparent that, as far as the project was concerned, the OCFNW did not represent a cohesive organisation; the project thus developed multiple channels of communication, reporting and accountability. OCFNW as a whole has, over ten years, had remarkable success given its diffuse nature and 'democratic'

decision-making structure; in its establishment the criminology project mirrored that structure (quite deliberately) and assumed that similar success would follow. The piloting, testing, tutorial support and final use of the material were dependent, ultimately, not on the decisions of the project, or even on the approval of OCFNW committees, but on decisions taken in individual colleges by co-ordinators, tutors and others.

It is clear that the original time-scale (two years) and the scale of finance (£2,000) negotiated with the FEU were serious underestimates. A more generously funded project over, say, three years would have had a reasonable chance of uncomplicated success. With more money, remission might have been bought for the writers (or other writers who perhaps would have been attracted). Certainly, a technical assistant for the editor would have been appointed who could also have been technical/production supervisor of the various steps of production.

The field of study of criminology was chosen for this pilot 'distance' learning venture because of its success in recruiting students to college-based courses, and because there also appeared to be an untapped market of workers with unsocial hours of work (e.g. police, prison staff, community/social workers) who might be recruited to a more flexibly arranged course. Thus, there were no intrinsic curricular reasons for the choice of criminology - nor were there any evident reasons to disbar it. Criminology appeared no better or worse a candidate than many other fields of knowledge for the immediate segmentation of knowledge into the ten 'compartments' on which the course team decided - and which (as matters transpired) were to have only limited interaction with each other in the actual materials put before students. Nevertheless, the choice of criminology did provide a context for the project which was non-negotiable. The writers and editor judged that the field of study had insufficient appropriate published material to be used as the feasibility study suggested; instead they would have to write them. Thus, the scale and nature of the task changed immediately. Moreover, criminology draws most of its theoretical underpinning from sociology. The question of whether the concepts and perspectives of sociology were more or less difficult to convey to learners through the means developed by the project than the concepts and perspectives of other fields of study was never debated.

Process factors

Using the notion of 'ideology' in the broad sense of a set of aims, ideas and justifications loosely associated with some social role or value position, it is clear that there were a number of ideologies present (and sometimes in competition) during the life of the project. There was general agreement on the broad progressive educational ideology of promoting and widening educational

opportunities for adults. But for some protagonists this ideology took shape meaningfully only when associated with 'innovations', 'breaking new ground', and 'associating the OCFNW with new national open learning trends'. Not necessarily in conflict with this, but intermittently pulling against it, was the 'professional' ideology of the writers and editor as academic sociologists and criminologists. There was a notion of the acceptable sociological product which others would see; there was a view that if simplified and presented in certain ways the product ceased to be worthy of the label of 'sociology'. Were the materials professional products to be counted in academic curriculum vitae or parts of an educational experiment which would remain within the confines of the OCFNW? And, of course, there were the 'management' and 'administrative' ideologies to which the co-directors were prone, in part at least. They were in a contractual relationship with the FEU and subject to the scrutiny of colleagues in OCFNW committees and in their own institutions; the 'management' goal was to bring the process to a successful conclusion as efficiently as possible, to have a respectable 'product' that would match up to the time and effort expended, and to keep to the timetable and within the budget.

The project, therefore, had aims which were never fully clarified and agreed on. The aim of a materials resource (a study guide to published works to be backed up by various kinds of tutorial contact) was spelled out in the feasibility study but rejected early by the project as inappropriate to criminology. In the minds of some members of the course team, the aim was to produce a 'reader with guide'. In the minds of others the aim was to produce open learning materials which would be relatively free-standing and which could be worked on independently by students, leaving them free to choose the extent to which they would seek tutorial assistance. There were concerns throughout about whether the incorporation of an 'open learning format' (SAQs, summaries, headlines, etc.) would be 'an insult to ... intelligence.'

The inter-institutional collaboration which was a feature of the project was, in one sense, ideological. It mirrored the nature of the OCFNW itself; it was an article of faith that all developments in the OCFNW should be collaborative and not dominated by single institutions, particularly higher education institutions. But it followed that delays, difficulties in communication and inefficient decision making were almost inherent in this project, where no single individual or group of individuals was in full possession of relevant information and able to make executive decisions.

The co-directors from the university and the polytechnic reckoned that they knew the world of further and tertiary education reasonably well and could identify (and identify with) the kinds of work situations and work environments in which the writers were placed. They knew that college lecturers do not have

their own offices and telephones and have contractual hours of teaching contact according to grade. Intellectually everybody understood that the cultures of universities, polytechnics and colleges are all different. However, it is probable that, in practice, the implications of these differences were not fully understood or taken account of. Thus attendance at meetings, travel expenses, communication by telephone during working hours, and other factors which higher education lecturers tended to take for granted were much more problematic in the colleges.

The structure of responsibility and decision making was, thus, explicable historically but unjustifiable analytically. The explanation is that nobody was clear how the project would unfold and, since expectations were that processes would be collaborative and operate on a shoe-string, a large group of people and resources were involved. The 'management' concerns of the co-directors led them to organise meetings, set targets, issue notes for action and negotiate contracts, but none of the participants were their 'employees' or working on the materials for more than a margin of their time. Finance was available only for nominal payments to writers; basically they were working from goodwill and professional interest. There is no doubt that the project would have worked much more efficiently under a single director who could also have functioned as editor. The director could have had control of the budget (apart from, perhaps, the sum for monitoring) and been supported by a technical assistant. This model would have assumed adequate finance and the part-time (at least) release of the director from other duties.

As far as technical processes are concerned, it does seem that a series of regular face-to-face meetings between members of the course-team (editor, writers, open learning consultants) should have been an essential element of the project from the very beginning. This was, in fact, realised by participants, but geography, finance and work situations prevented their taking place. The meetings which were held were organised by the co-directors and were largely concerned with goal setting and crisis management. Schedules of course team meetings, with requirement to pre-circulate draft material, would have provided a timetable to the work whch would be internally generated rather than externally suggested by the co-directors. The role of the open learning consultants would have been to comment at early draft stages and to work with writers in structuring materials until final second draft units acceptable to all members of the course team were produced. Evidently, the criminology project should have begun with a more substantial 'open learning workshop' which all members of the course team should have attended. It is indisputable that they all needed some element of 'training' for the project.

The experience of the criminology project confirmed that, in the production of open learning materials, tight, realistic and logical scheduling, understood and

accepted by all, was crucial. If the project had had this and been able to keep to it, many of the referencing, typographical and reprographic errors noted above would not have occurred. Those that did could have been picked up before final printing by a technical assistant working with the editor.

Such tight scheduling would have a point in it by which relatively firm decisions on the extracts to be used from published sources would have been taken so that copyright permission might then be sought (by the technical assistant) as efficiently as possible. The process of tracking down copyright holders can be tedious but is essential. The final experience of the criminology project was that most publishers require nominal or nil payment in granting copyright permission for the limited use proposed by the OCFNW, but not all. Some (often American) publishers granted permission in terms which did not discriminate between the possible usages of the materials in question. In total, the criminology project paid out about £400 to publishers and authors for copyright permission.

What relevance did the monitoring process have to the development of the project? It meant that there was a reasonably high level of awareness of the differences in perception between the various protagonists and some understanding of why problems arose although the structure was set and constraints of time and money fixed. Opportunities for large-scale reassessment of direction were never possible. Certainly, the experience of the project would appear to confirm that systematic monitoring is both healthy and helpful. It is useful if those engaged in monitoring are not closely involved in the processes they are monitoring and if the model of monitoring used is 'impure' in the sense that interim results are fed back systematically and non-judgementally to participants. The latter point is worthy of emphasis – 'monitoring' is not the same as 'evaluation'.

Outcome factors

The outcomes of the criminology project are various. There is now an open learning variant of the Stage B Criminology unit in use in the OCFNW. All signs – from the development testing, pilot and initial usage stages – are that the materials will be used successfully in various ways. They will be used by some students with a minimum of tutorial or class contact (in extremes they will probably be used by students at a distance working independently). Other OCFNW students will take advantage of these materials if, because of personal circumstances, they have to withdraw from the regular classroom-based criminology unit. If, at any college, the one-year Stage B Criminology unit fails to recruit a viable number for a classroom course, students who are recruited can be offered the alternative of studying via the materials. It is clear that OCFNW students and tutors on regular courses will find the materials release more time

for discussion and small group work, and are an aid to revision. No audio or visual materials have been built into the criminology open learning course; students have not commented adversely on this. However, the materials now exist and can always be supplemented with any illustrative material which seems appropriate.

We have limited evidence on the kinds of students who will be recruited to the OCFNW through the existence of an open learning course. The developmental testing and pilot stages made it clear that police and police trainees, social workers and members of related caring professions (particularly if they work unsocial hours) are potential recruits. One prisoner enrolled at the pilot stage but dropped out. There is evident opportunity to recruit from those who do not live close to a college or move home while engaged in study. In all sorts of ways, the presence of the open learning materials increases flexibility of access for potential students.

There is no current sign that the OCFNW will embark upon a venture similar to the criminology project. Nevertheless, it is important for the OCFNW that it does not lose sight of the valuable lessons and experience gained. It evidently will continue to look for ways to 'deliver' its courses as flexibly as possible; the development of learning materials is one way. What the OCFNW is unlikely to do in the future is to seek to develop such materials without guaranteed financial resources of a scale suitable to the task in prospect.

The co-directors and the members of the course team gained, from the project, the opportunity to work together across institutions and across the binary divide. It was one co-director's view that the important thing was 'not how good or bad the materials are but what we have learnt from the experience'; another observed that the project would prove to be 'an extremely beneficial curriculum development exercise'. Both writers felt that their experience on the project had improved their teaching of criminology.

There seems to be good reason to believe that the criminology open learning materials could have use and value outside the OCFNW setting. In the developmenal testing phase, for example, first year polytechnic sociology undergraduates rated the materials which they saw as very useful. The editor and writers certainly retained the view throughout that there were no comparable published materials available in criminology and that wide usage outside the OCFNW was a possibility. Hence they implicitly reserved to themselves copyright of usage of their materials outside the OCFNW. For their part the co-directors explicitly limited their own responsibility and concern to the OCFNW; copyright permissions from publishers and authors were, therefore, sought only in relation to the OCFNW. It was, and is, for the editors and writers to seek copyright permission for usage on a wider basis if they so desire.

One participant observed that the OCFNW criminology project had been 'well worthwhile' since it had highlighted the 'problems involved when people are brought together to produce materials on a shoe-string.' To some extent it is possible to draw some straightforward 'messages for the field' from the OCFNW criminology experience and that is what the concluding section of this report attempts to do. Such 'messages', expressed simply as they are, need to be heard with the complexities and ambiguities of the OCFNW experience always in mind. Moreover, there is an important open question on which participants in the OCFNW project never reached final agreement. To what extent are open learning materials appropriate for all subjects of study and what is lost in the transmission of courses into 'open learning format'? Is the quality and quantity of student 'learning' the same, or is there loss in critical understanding and appreciation?

5. CONCLUSIONS

Among the most important 'messages' for the further and adult education field from the OCFNW criminology project must be the conclusion that:

> *the development of open learning materials for use by students in a variety of contexts is very well worth doing*

and greatly enhances a programme's potential for overcoming the familiar barriers of student access to time, location and convenience. Now that the criminology project has finally 'made it', there is an excitement within the colleges of the OCFNW about the possibilities that have opened up.

Despite the great sums of money expended by the Open University and Open Tech projects, it is clear that:

> *substantial and worthwhile open learning materials can be developed in the further education context with limited financial expenditure.*

It is true that the FEU grant was only £2,000 (raised to £3,000) and that the real cost of the development must have been around £10,000. However, much of that expenditure could be accounted for in terms of staff time which, with adequate forward planning, most further education colleges could arrange to absorb and redistribute. The message here is not about the production of open learning materials 'on the cheap' (the more money that is available the better tested, illustrated and developed materials are likely to be). It is that an acceptable and worthwhile product is possible with a reasonable budget.

It is also evident from the OCFNW criminology project that:

> *open learning materials development has considerable potential for encouraging inter-institutional collaboration and the drawing from institutions of their particular strengths.*

The criminology project drew on the experience of further education lecturers in teaching criminology to mature students at the appropriate level, and on their 'grass roots' contact with mature students in the further education context; from the polytechnic it drew the academic expertise of the editor, sophisticated design, typographic and reprographic facilities, and the co-ordinating and supervisory services of the continuing education office; and from the university it drew research and monitoring skills. This inter-institutional collaboration caused logistical problems but nevertheless brought together, and capitalised upon, a variety of distributed expertise.

There are hints from the OCFNW criminology project that it could have been more ambitious in that:

> *open learning materials development could take place in particular subject areas, fields of study and levels of expertise which would serve a variety of courses leading to a range of end qualifications.*

It is possible that criminology materials could be of use in a variety of courses (higher education, in-service vocational training and others) but, for copyright reasons, their use is currently tied to the OCFNW. The objectives could, of course, have been different when the project began and have consisted of developing a sequence of core materials appropriate variously for a range of identified but different courses.

Crucially, however, further education can learn significantly from the mistakes, delays and hiatuses of the OCFNW criminology project. Inadequate finance, further education structures and personal circumstances all proved difficult barriers to surmount. The experience of open learning development over the past two decades, and the more immediate experience of the FEU/OCFNW criminology project, suggest that there are ten factors to which attention must be directed initially and which must be got right if successful development is to take place within the time and budget acceptable to all parties and useful to students. They are:

- adequate finance;
- remission of time from teaching and other duties for writers and editor, according to the scale of their commitment to the development. For writers, blocks of time remission might be most valuable;
- technical assistance for editor (e.g. in checking references, proofs, copyright);
- adequate attention to issue of copyright and appropriate procedures for gaining copyright permissions;
- training for writers in structuring and organising of text for use by students independently. The extent of such training should depend on the availability and use of expert 'open learning' consultants;
- development testing of materials on 'guinea pig' students at such a stage that revision can be made to materials before they are finalised;

- systematic monitoring of all procedures by a semi-independent researcher who, at agreed stages, reports on progress to all participants;

- development of a course team approach, with regular meetings attended by editor, writers, consultants, technical assistant and monitor, in which materials and progress are reviewed; and with realistic schedules and deadlines for drafts associated with such meetings and clearly understood by all;

- clear prior operational objectives on the kinds of materials being produced, the use to which they will be put and the kind of students who will use them;

- the drawing up of agreed contracts for participants, which include such issues as the ownership of copyright of materials newly produced.

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